

## **This Body Only Knows** by coldqueen

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**Summary:** A recovery in three parts; also known as what happens when Brenner gets what's coming to him, and Jane escapes a final time.

# **This Body Only Knows**

Title: This Body Only Knows

Genre: Television

Series: Stranger Things

Characters: Jane "Eleven" Hopper, Max Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Jim Hopper, etc.

Rating: PG

Spoilers: S2

Summary: A recovery in three parts; also known as what happens when Brenner gets what's coming to him, and Jane escapes a final time.

Author's Note: Partially inspired by MS MR's "Wrong Victory".

Disclaimer: Come on, you know I don't own it or make money from it.

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## **Summer 1986**

There were drops of blood on the sleeve of his jacket and the cop in him was already working through three different ways to get rid of it so it wouldn't be traced back to him. Not that anyone would bring charges. Hopper had the distinct impression that all of the scientists under this roof were glad to be rid of Brenner. Even the security personnel had disappeared and weren't stopping his progress through the complex. His gun was still warm in his hand, his palm sweaty but steady, and he was more than willing to take down a few more people until he found Jane.

The rooms he passed were numbered and each had the same set up. Sterile white walls, bare cot, and empty of all life. Some had taken damage though and Hopper was hopeful that the children who'd done it had escaped, like Kali. Room number two was covered in

scratches, some so deep that the wall itself looked cracked from floor to ceiling. Room number five was scorched, black marks scattered on the wall as if by design. Room number nine was upside down, the cot sitting on the ceiling as if it belonged there.

Room number eleven was occupied.

She had knotted herself into the corner of the room, between the cot and wall, made herself so small he almost didn't see her. She was still, her eyes blinking but unseeing, her only movement the soft brush of her fingertips across the short buzz of hair left on her head. She was back in the tank and shorts of her childhood, but what had seemed perfunctory on a child was almost obscene on a teenage girl and for a heart stopping second Hopper feared that she'd faced more than just one danger in this place. He knew his daughter, however, had spent years figuring out what every minute expression meant and she wasn't traumatized...she was sad. She'd withdrawn completely into herself in a way she only did when she was trying to keep the pieces of herself together.

Hopper reached for the doorknob, pausing when the soft click of the lock sounded just before he touched it. He looked at the camera above the door and nodded, understanding that he had help from an unknown source here and that meant they'd probably get out of here with no more problems. "Let's go home, Jane."

She launched herself off the wall, wrapping her legs and arms around him in a desperate way that she hadn't done since the fall of 1984, when her nightmares were still so fresh that she sometimes couldn't tell the difference between dream and reality. Hopper wanted to just hold her for a good long time, to reassure himself she was alright, but they needed to get out of here.

They didn't see anyone else on their way out, Hopper carried her through the halls easily and wasn't surprised by the sharp click of the front doors locking behind them. They made it all the way to his truck before she spoke.

"He's gone?"

"Yeah, baby. He's gone."

"You'll get in trouble."

"Don't worry about me," Hop retorted, slamming the passenger door shut with a sigh of frustration. He rushed around to the driver's seat, driving off fast enough to spit gravel at the complex gates. "Let's go home."

"Don't want to go home, not safe," she whispered and his mind flashed back to yesterday morning. Arriving home for lunch to find the front door open, the inside trashed, and her gone. They'd only just moved back into his house by the lake a year ago, not long after they'd gone public with her as his daughter. It made it easier for Joyce and him to home school Jane, easier for her to see her friends, easier for him to check on her through the day.

"Okay," he decided, shifting gears and heading towards a familiar dirt path instead. "I know where we can go."

The cabin in the woods was still habitable. He'd made sure to replace the windows, locked it up tight after they moved out. It was dark on the inside, musty, but the generator started up easy enough. She was standing in the middle of the front room when he came back in. "I need to call Mike and your friends. They've been worried about you but I wouldn't let them come."

"No Mike."

He gaped at her in the dark, reaching over and turning on the light before replying. "You *don't* want Mike?"

"No."

Hopper thought back to how he found her, and his hands clenched. "Did they hurt you? I can call Dr. Owens, he owes me. He won't tell."

"I want Max."

That was almost more startling than her not wanting to see Mike. Hopper knew they'd made inroads since their rough beginning, but out of all her friends, she and Max had never been close. They were the only two girls in the group so there were things the two of them had talked about that didn't include the others but those moments

were few and far between.

Until now.

"Okay, I'll be back. I'll go radio for her."

It only took half an hour for her to arrive, her bike wheels crunching outside the cabin the only announcement of her arrival before the small redhead was bursting through the front door. Jane had moved into her old bedroom, shutting the door and hiding herself away and waiting. He had heard her pacing through the thin wall but she didn't answer or reply when he tried to talk to her. It only made his nerves scream tighter with tension and pain.

"She's in the bedroom," Hopper announced, gesturing to the closed door. Max nodded and looked nervous, walking tentatively toward the door and jumping when it opened without warning. She squared her shoulders immediately, gathered up her courage, and walked in.

It slammed shut behind her.

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Max wasn't sure what to expect when her radio had crackled and erupted with the chief's voice. Certainly not a request for her to come to the cabin and leave the boys behind. She knew that Mike, Lucas, and Will had taken their bikes and were patrolling the town, looking for any sign of the Department of Energy. Dustin was camped outside of the Hopper house, sworn to call if the chief returned with Eleven.

She left as soon as the Chief had asked, and she was closer to the woods than the boys so she'd probably beat them there by an hour or more, if they'd even heard the conversation between them which given the limited range of the radios was not a guarantee.

"El?"

"Hi, Max," her response came from somewhere close to the floor. When Max's eyes finally adjusted she found the hunched form of her friend sitting next to the dresser. She barely recognized her.

"Are you okay?"

She sat next to her, reaching out and running her fingers across her forehead where a small cut had already scabbed over. It probably happened when they were cutting her hair and it made Max want to punch someone. She knew that Jane hadn't cut her hair since she'd escaped the first time, letting it grow until the curls softened and lengthened into beachy waves that even Max envied.

"No."

It was a simple answer to a loaded question but Max didn't know what to do with it. She wished Joyce were here, or Nancy, because they would know what to say to make Jane feel better. They would be able to hold her and give her comfort and make her realize that the hair doesn't mean anything, it's just hair. Max didn't care about things like that, she cut her hair off when she felt like it and ignored it most of the time. Still, Max had a responsibility to her friend so she had to try.

"It's just...hair. It'll grow back. You'll actually be fashionable. We'll dye it blonde or red and you'll look like Annie Lennox," she tried, patting Jane awkwardly on the hand and bumping their shoulders companionably.

"It's not about the hair," Jane explained, and now that she was close Max could feel her shaking. "I wasn't real to him."

"To who?"

"Papa." Jane wanted to cry, Max could hear it in her voice. "Not a daughter. Not a girl. Not a person."

"You felt alone. You felt like you were nothing," Max gathered, feeling the reverberation of those feelings in her own chest. She wrapped her now equally shaking fingers around Jane's, settling down until their sides were solidly pressing and together they calmed down, until the shaking stopped. "I know how that feels."

For Jane, it was being back in the laboratory, held down, stripped, everything that made her *Jane* taken away. For Max, it was being home, listening to her stepfather screaming in the next room and hoping that he won't turn it on her but he never did. He screamed at

her mother, he screamed at Billy, but never at her. It was like she was beneath his attention, unworthy of the effort it took to be that angry. Her mother belonged to him, Billy belonged to him, but Max was an outlier. She didn't belong anywhere.

Jane pressed her head onto Max's shoulder and they curled together until it was hard to tell where one girl ended and the other began. It was instinctive and primal and somehow made sense. Sometimes the most profound connection doesn't come with the person you can tell anything to, but with the person you don't need to tell anything because they've been there and they already know.

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"You were supposed to call," Mike accused, pushing past Hopper and into the cabin. Behind him Lucas smiled apologetically, and Dustin and Will just smirked before following him.

"She needed some time," Hop explained though it brought no comfort.

"Where is she?"

"She and Max are in the bedroom."

That brought all movement to a stop, all the guys turning to stare at Hop with surprise. "And there's been no bloodshed?"

"She asked for her."

Mike scoffed, but was suddenly unsure of himself. He'd always been Jane's first call, before Hopper, before the others. He was already on edge, pissed off that Chief Hopper had prevented him from being the one to go in after her, and now to know that she'd asked for someone else before him only made it worse.

The door creaked open and Max slipped out, placing her finger to her lips and shushing them silently. "She fell asleep, and I think she needs it so shut up and get out."

"You heard the lady," Hopper agreed with more than a small bit of mirth. Max and the three other boys moved to leave, but Mike didn't budge. He stared down the Chief with a glare, and while three years

ago it'd lacked weight, he'd gained almost a foot of height and knew now just how far he could push Hopper's patience when it came to his daughter.

"I'm not leaving until I see her."

"Well...we'll come back tomorrow. Bring her some Eggos and those candies she likes," Lucas interjected, twining his fingers with Max's and tugging her out the door completely. Will and Dustin had already made the smart decision and were waiting on their bikes.

The door shut with a quiet thunk, but Hopper only waited a moment to speak. "She's had a rough couple days. She needs some sleep."

"I just want to see her. I feel-" Mike stopped and shook his head. "I need to see her."

Hopper sighed and sat down heavily in the kitchen chair. "I wish I had a drink. Go ahead, kid. Let me know if she needs anything."

Mike was inside the darkened room before Hop was even done speaking, leaving the door open a few inches because despite the situation, that was the Chief's rule when they were alone together. Jane was lying on the mattress, curled into a ball, and even in the small sliver of light that leaked through the doorway he could see the damage that had been done.

There were hand shaped bruises on her arm, and small cuts on the skin of her neck and forehead. She'd fought back, both physically and mentally, but it had done no good. She'd still been taken and he knew that she hated to feel like she wasn't in control. Even when she was studying, she set her own pace, her own goals, and no one pushed Jane like she pushed herself.

Mike knelt beside the bed, running the back of his hand down her cheek and watching as her eyes blinked open and she pushed her sleepiness away. "Tell me you at least kicked some ass."

She nodded. "Mouthbreathers."

"That's my girl," Mike boasted softly. "What about Brenner?"



"Gone," she answered, her eyes shifting to the door and the telltale movement of Hopper outside. "Dad."

"Good," and he meant it. If there was one person on this earth that Mike would've liked to get his hands on personally, it was that man. For how Jane had grown up, for the nightmares she still had every once and a while, for what happened to Will and to Barb, and now for taking Jane again and giving her that wounded look again, like every hand that reached out to her was going to hurt.

"Scoot over." She moved without thinking, never hesitating to do as he asked. They slid together like they'd done dozens of times before. She fit against his side awkwardly but they'd long perfected the compromise of being close. She tucked her elbow underneath her body, one hand resting between them, the other gripping his sleeve. Her face pressed into the hollow of his throat, and he could feel her eyelashes brushing against his jawline as she settled next to him.

"You can go back to sleep. I'm staying," Mike reassured her, curling his arm around her waist even though he knew from experience that it'd fall asleep on him in less than half an hour. He didn't want to leave, not when the agony of finding her gone was still so fresh in his mind. Bad enough that Hopper had been resolute, already certain of who'd taken her and how to get her back, and unwilling to spare the time to clue them in. He'd already been climbing in his truck when Mike and Will had biked up, here to help Jane with her math school work because it was the one subject she always struggled with.

Only she was gone, the house was trashed, and Chief Hopper had passed yelling-angry and moved straight into cold rage and that was about as far as the old man could be pushed without someone getting shot. He left, heading off who knows where, and Mike was left standing on the front lawn with no idea of what to do or where to go from there.

He hadn't slept in two days, waiting to hear anything from Chief Hopper, riding his bike around town when he couldn't get the car from his parents. His friends sometimes did the same, but mostly he rode alone, stopping only to speak into the radio and wait for a response that never came. When he couldn't ride anymore, he went to their house and cleaned, putting things back on shelves, sweeping up

broken glass. It wasn't perfect, he was still a teenage boy, but it was passable. Jane would have it spotless again within hours, she was a neatnik and hated clutter, he knew.

She sighed against him, pressing her cheek against the plaid of his shirt, fingering one of the buttons idly. "Still pretty?"

He frowned, leaned back so that he could see her face and acted like he was giving it thought. Jane blushed but stared back unflinchingly, resisting the urge to touch the shorn fuzz that now covered her head. She tried to remember what it felt like when he tugged playfully on one of her curls, or when he pushed back her bangs after they fell in her eyes, but she couldn't. She couldn't seem to remember how anything felt since she sat on the floor in that cell. She wasn't cold, she wasn't hot, she wasn't sad, she wasn't angry.

"Still pretty," Mike decided with a nod, pressing a kiss against her forehead and pulling her somehow closer than they already were. She could feel his heart beating under her cheek, could hear Hopper pacing in the living room, could smell the perfume Max had worn in the air still, but she could still taste the metallic air of the lab. Behind her eyes, she couldn't forget the way she had looked in the reflections of glass as the scientists had held her down and started cutting. Her clothes, her hair, her sense of self, left in shreds on the laboratory floor.

"It's just hair, El. It'll grow back."

"It's just hair," she repeated, partly to try to convince herself and partly to reassure Mike.

Except it wasn't.

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Review, please.